B.12 VEGETATED FILTER STRIPS

DESCRIPTION

Vegetated filter strips, also known as vegetated buffer strips, are vegetated sections of land similar to grassed swales, except they are essentially flat with low slopes, and are designed only to accept runoff overland sheet flow (Schueler, 1992). They may appear in any vegetated form from grassland to forest, and are designed to intercept upstream flow, lower flow velocity, and spread water out as sheet flow (Schueler, 1992). The dense vegetative cover facilitates conventional pollutant removal through detention, filtration by vegetation, and infiltration into soil (Yu and Kaighn, 1992). Wooded and grass filter strips have slightly higher removal rates. Dissolved nutrient removal for either type of vegetative cover is usually poor, however wooded strips show slightly higher removal due to increased retention and

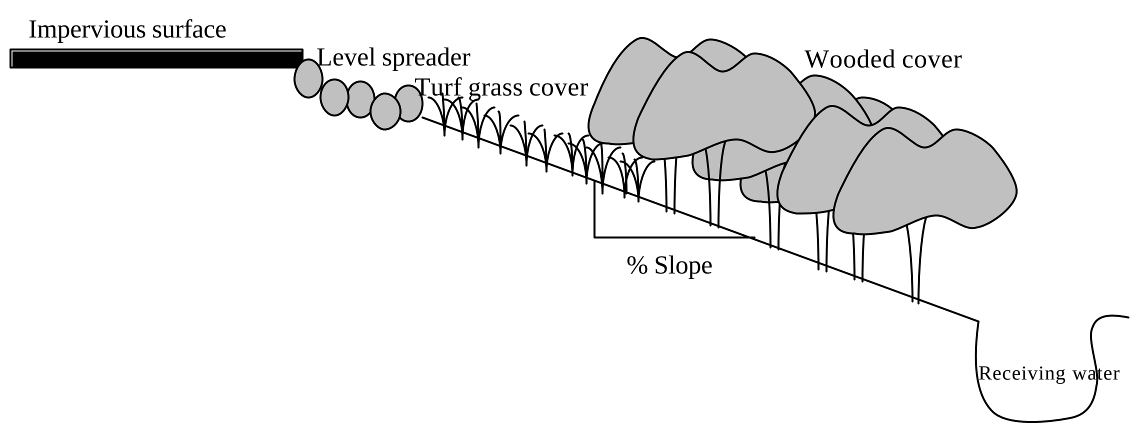

Figure 1. Conceptual design for a vegetated filter strip (Indiana County Conservation District)

sequestration by the plant community (Florida Department of Transportation, 1994).

Although an inexpensive control measure, they are most useful in contributing watershed areas where peak runoff velocities are low, as they are unable to treat the high flow velocities typically associated with high impervious cover (Barret, et al., 1993).

Similar to grassed swales, filter strips can last for 10 to 20 years with proper conditions and regular maintenance. Life expectancy is significantly diminished if uniform sheet flow and dense vegetation are not maintained.

ADVANTAGES

1. Lowers runoff velocity (Schueler, 1987).
2. Slightly reduces runoff volume (Schueler, 1987).
3. Slightly reduces watershed imperviousness (Schueler, 1987).
4. Slightly contributes to groundwater recharge (Schueler, 1987).
5. Aesthetic benefit of vegetated “open spaces” (Colorado Department of Transportation, 1992).
6. Preserves the character of riparian zones, prevents erosion along streambanks, and provides excellent urban wildlife habitat (Schueler, 1992).

LIMITATIONS

1. Filter strips cannot treat high velocity flows, and do not provide enough storage or infiltration to effectively reduce peak discharges to predevelopment levels for design storms (Schueler, 1992). This lack of quantity control dictates use in rural or low density development.
2. Requires slope less than 5%.
3. Requires low to fair permeability of natural subsoil.
4. Large land requirement.
5. Often concentrates water, which significantly reduces effectiveness.
6. Pollutant removal is unreliable in urban settings.

DESIGN CRITERIA

1. Successful performance of filter strips relies heavily on maintaining shallow unconcentrated flow (Colorado Department of Transportation, 1992). To avoid flow channelization and maintain performance, a filter strip should:

    (1) Be equipped with a level spreading device for even distribution of runoff,
    (2) Contain dense vegetation with a mix of erosion resistant, soil binding species,
    (3) Be graded to a uniform, even and relatively low slope,
    (4) Laterally traverse the contributing runoff area (Schueler, 1987),
    (5) The area to be used for the strip should be free of gullies or rills that can concentrate overland flow (Schueler, 1987),
    (6) Filters strip should be placed 3 to 4 feet from edge of pavement to accommodate a vegetation free zone (Washington State Department of Transportation, 1995). The top edge of the filter strip along the pavement should be designed to avoid the situation where runoff would travel along the top of the filter strip, rather than through it. Dilhalla, et al., (1986) suggest that

berms be placed at 50 to 100 feet intervals perpendicular to the top edge of the strip to prevent runoff from bypassing it (as cited in Washington State Department of Transportation, 1995),

(7) Top edge of the filter strip should follow the same elevational contour. If a section of the edge of the strip dips below the contour, runoff will tend to form a channel toward the low spot,

(8) Filter strips should be landscaped after other portions of the project are completed (Washington State Department of Transportation, 1995). However, level spreaders and strips used as sediment control measures during the construction phase can be converted to permanent controls if they can be regraded and reseeded to the top edge of the strip.

2. Filter strips can be used on an upgradient from watercourses, wetlands, or other water bodies, along toes and tops of slopes, and at outlets of other stormwater management structures (Boutiette and Duerring, 1994). They should be incorporated into street drainage and master drainage planning (Urbonas, 1992). The most important criteria for selection and use of this BMP are soils, space, and slope, where:

(1) *Soils and moisture are adequate to grow relatively dense vegetative stands.* Underlying soils should be of low permeability so that the majority of the applied water discharges as surface runoff. The range of desirable permeability is between 0.06 to 0.6 inches/hour (Horner, 1985). Common soil textural classes are clay, clay loam, and silty clay. The presence of clay and organic matter in soils improves the ability of filter strips to remove pollutants from the surface runoff (Schueler, 1992). Greater removal of soluble pollutants can be achieved where the water table is within 3 feet of the surface (i.e., within the root zone) (Schueler, 1992). Filter strips function most effectively where the climate permits year-round dense vegetation. They are not recommended in arid regions where vegetation in upland areas is sparse.

(2) *Sufficient space is available.* Because filter strip effectiveness depends on having an evenly distributed sheet flow, the size of the contributing area and the associated volume runoff have to be limited (Urbonas, 1992). To prevent concentrated flows from forming, it is advisable to have each filter strip serve a contributing area of five acres or less (Schueler, 1987). When used alone, filter strip application is in areas where impervious cover is low to moderate and where there are small fluctuations in peak flow.

(3) *Longitudinal slope is five percent or less.* When filter strips are used on steep or unstable slopes, the formation of rills and gullies can disrupt sheet flow (Urbonas, 1992). As a result filter strips will not function at all on slopes greater than 15 percent and may have reduced effectiveness on slopes

between 6 to 15 percent.

3. The design should be based on the same methods detailed for swales. The preferred geometry of a filter strip is rectangular, and this should be used when applying the design procedures of vegetated swales.

   When using this procedure, the following provisions apply specifically to filter strips (Horner, 1993):

   (1) Slopes should be no greater than 15 percent and should preferably be lower than 5 percent, and be uniform throughout the strip after final grading.
   (2) Hydraulic residence time normally no less than 9 minutes, and in no case less than 5 minutes.
   (3) Average velocity no greater than 0.9 feet/second.
   (4) Manning's friction factor (*n*) of 0.02 should be used for grassed strips, *n* of 0.024 if strip is infrequently mowed, or a selected higher value if the strip is wooded.
   (5) The width should be no greater than that where a uniform flow distribution can be assured.
   (6) Average depth of flow (design depth) should be no more than 0.5 inches.
   (7) Hydraulic radius is taken to be equal to the design flow depth.

5. Filter strips function best with longitudinal slopes less than 10 percent, and ideally less than 5 percent. As filter strip length becomes shorter, slope becomes more influential. Therefore, when a minimum strip length of 20 feet is utilized, slopes should be graded as close to zero as drainage permits (Schueler, 1987). With steeper slopes, terracing through using landscape timber, concrete weirs, or other means may be required to maintain sheet flow.
6. Calculate the flow rate of stormwater to be mitigated by the vegetated filter strip using the Los Angeles County Department of Public Works *Method for Calculating Standard Urban Stormwater Mitigation Plan (SUSMP) Flow Rates and Volumes Based on 0.75-inches of Rainfall*. A minimum of 8 feet is recommended for filter strip width.
7. Another design issue is runoff collection and distribution to the strip, and release to a transport system or receiving water (Horner, 1985). Flow spreader devices should be used to introduce the flow evenly to the filter strip (Urbonas, 1992). Concentrated flow needs to use a level spreader to evenly distribute flow onto a strip. There are many alternative spreader devices, with the main consideration being that the overland flow spreader be distributed equally across the strip. Level spreader options include porous pavement strips, stabilized turf strips, slotted curbing, rock-filled trench, concrete sills, or plastic-lined trench that acts as a small detention pond (Yu and Kaighn, 1992). The outflow and filter side lip of the spreader should have a zero slope

to ensure even runoff distribution (Yu and Kaighn, 1992). Once in the filter strip, most runoff from significant events will not be infiltrated and will require a collection and conveyance system. Grass-lined swales are often used for this purpose and can provide another BMP level. A filter strip can also drain to a storm sewer or street gutter (Urbonas, 1992).

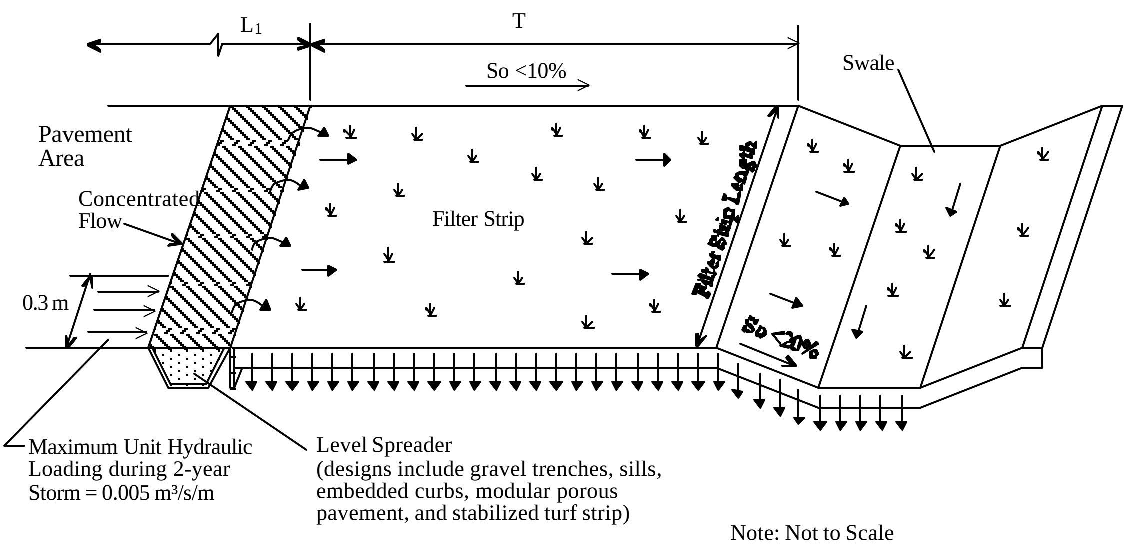

Figure 2. Sample filter strip design (Urbonas, 1992).

8. Filter strips should be constructed of dense, soil-binding deep-rooted water-resistant plants. For grassed filter strips, dense turf is needed to promote sedimentation and entrapment, and to protect against erosion (Yu and Kaighn, 1992). Turf grass should be maintained to a blade height of 2 to 4 inches. Most engineered, sheet-flow systems are seeded with specific grasses. Common grasses established for filter strip systems are rye, fescue, reed canary, and Bermuda (Horner, 1985). Tall fescue and orchard grasses grow well on slopes and under low nutrient conditions (Horner, 1985). The grass species chosen should be appropriate for the climatic conditions and maintenance criteria for each project.
9. Trees and woody vegetation have been shown to increase infiltration and improve performance of filter strips. Trees and shrubs provide many stormwater management benefits by intercepting some rainfall before it reaches the ground, and improving infiltration and retention through the presence of a spongy, organic layer of materials that accumulates underneath the plants (Schueler, 1987). As discussed previously

in this section, wooded strips have shown significant increases in pollutant removal over grass strips. Maintenance for wooded strips is virtually non-existent, another argument for using trees and shrubs. However, there are drawbacks to using woody plants. Since the density of the vegetation is not as great as a turf grass cover, wooded filter strips need additional length to accommodate more vegetation. In addition, shrub and tree trunks can cause uneven distribution of sheet flow, and increase the possibility for development of gullies and channels. Consequently, wooded strips require flatter slopes than a typical grass cover strip to ensure that the presence of heavier plant stems will not facilitate channelization.

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The following is a known location where a Vegetated Filter Strip was installed. The design of the installed strip in the location may vary from what is recommended in this SUSMP due to its specific circumstances. Los Angeles County does not endorse nor warranty any design used in the location herein. Each individual case may require that the design be tailored to perform properly.

Installed Location (City/Address)	Brand/Manufacturer	Owner/Client
I-605/SR91	N/A	Caltrans